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The transformation of the foreign policy in Transylvania of the Rákóczi after the Thirty Years War

Thesis summary

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1648 is a well known year for European as well as Hungarian history. The peace of Westphalia and the death of György Rákóczi I, Prince of Transylvania, seem to be closing a period: they are events after which it became necessary to re-think politics, include new elements and preferences, or change the ranking of the previously existing ones. The peaces of Münster and Osnabrück are traditionally defined as the last steps of closing the age of religious wars. The assumption of the dissertation is that the Prince, who took the power in 1648, had to form new directives for his foreign policy not only because his plans differed from those of his father, but also because the international environment had drastically changed with the end of the Thirty Years War and Transylvanian foreign policy had to accommodate itself to the new circumstances.

The aim of the dissertation is to show how foreign policy was transformed under the rule of György Rákóczi II in its initiative phase, until the autumn of 1657. Apart from the actual political actions and envisaged strategic aims, the analysis of the changes in the discourse around foreign policy and the strategies of its legitimisation also have to be addressed. Thus, the dissertation is a contribution not only to the history of politics in its narrow sense – meaning the history of events – but also to the history of ideas, or even mentalities, of politics. It also builds its analyses on a broader, previously neglected, basis of sources, including Hungarian, German, Romanian, Swedish, French and Danish source editions and the materials of archives and manuscript collections from Budapest, Esztergom, Vienna, Stockholm, Uppsala, Berlin, Hannover, Dresden, London, Oxford and Chelmsford.

The dissertation is organised around the confessional element in foreign policy, which made it possible to connect its results to some important debates of European – primarily German – historiography on the Early Modern period. This means, in the first place, the polemics over the theory of confessionalisation: one of the most important – and also, most controversial – elements of the concept, as developed by Heinz Schilling and Wolfgang Reinhard in the 1980s, was the interference between the formation of the confessions and the establishment of the

interpreted as an anti-Catholic move. According to this trend, it was not the protection of the Protestants, but the general defence of the liberties of conscience, that found its way to the legitimisation of the war.

All this leads one to the conclusion that confessional interests and the reason of state changed positions in the foreign policy of György Rákóczi II. Contrary to the rule of his father, religious factors only meant a complementary element in reaching his own dynamic goals of power politics. The only radically Calvinist measure in the church politics of the Prince, the reinforcement of the expulsion of Jesuits, was less important from a religious perspective than that of legal technicalities. The confessional element had the same career as the one described for Europe in general for the second half of the 17th century by Johannes Burkhard: it did not disappear, but it lost its primary position, and was turned into a complementary element, mainly used for legitimatory purposes.

My publications, related to the topic of the dissertation

"Claes Ralamb's resa till Konstantinopel 1657–1658" [Claes Ralamb's Journey to Constantinople 1657–1658]. In: *Karolinska Förhändelseskrönikor* (accepted for publication).

"Vásárlás a miszálkos alapú külpolitikára: Bang Skjotte útja a Rákócziakhoz 1651–1657" [Purchase of the miszálkos policy on Rákóczi's side: The Journey of Bang Skjotte to the Rákóczi]. In: *Acta* (accepted for publication).

"Rákóczi Zsigmond két esküvéje" [The Two Weddings of Zsigmond Rákóczi]. In: Erdélyi Gabriella – Tusor Péter (ed.), *Mindennapi választások: Tanulmányok Péter Katalin köszöntésére* [Everyday Choices: Studies in the Honor of Katalin Péter], Budapest: MTA Történettudományi Intézet, 2007. (CD edition) 291–311.

"*Béllum iustum*-érvelések II. Rákóczi György háborúiban" [*Béllum iustum* Argumentation in the Wars of György Rákóczi II]. In: *Szétszórakodás*, Vol. 140, 2006, pp. 939–971.

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newly gained power for either anti-Habsburg or anti-Ottoman actions. The legitimization of the war – the formation of which can be followed in several steps in this case – was building upon the invitation coming from the Poles, the defence of their interest, and the protection of the liberty of conscience. The personal motivation of the Prince can be found primarily in his dynastic interests, and the economic gains connected to them; on the other hand, the reason to unleash the war can be found in the structural specificities of the Transylvanian and Polish states: the lack of a strong estates-based control of the power of the Prince on one side, and – through the individual ambitions of the magnates in the field of foreign policy – the extraordinarily strong power of the estates on the other.

It is clear from the private correspondence of György Rákóczi I that the confessional element had an outstanding relevance for his foreign policy. One could also say that it provided the goals – even if not the only ones – for which the Prince had to mobilise the means of power politics. This relation between aims and means turned over after 1648. Although Zsigmond Rákóczi selected a wife strictly from the offspring of Calvinist German princely houses, his opinion was that in order to further the co-operation with the Palffy-circle, Transylvanian foreign policy had to drop the religious discourse in its relations with the estates in Hungary. In his politics towards the Kingdom of Hungary, György Rákóczi II had indeed given up references on the confessional factor. His first two wars, the armed conflicts in Moldavia and Wallachia, in 1653 and 1655 respectively, had no connections to the traditions of confessionally-based foreign politics in their legitimization or actual motivations. His contacts with the estates of the Reczepsopolia were indeed organised around the religious principle: the primary goal of these was to establish an anti-Catholic block, even if it was not represented in the possible legitimization for the Prince's intervention in the first half of the decade. It is nevertheless noteworthy that legitimization and actual motivation switched positions at 1656: the Prince – maintaining good relations with Catholic Polish magnates – did everything in his power so that his campaign could not be

modern state. My analysis of Transylvanian foreign policy has its main focus on the question of how a state, which represented itself as multi-confessional and showed only very few signs of developing into a confessional state, could place itself in an international system which – according to Schilling – formed itself around the confessional element, only to surpass it later on.

On the other hand, the dissertation was inspired by yet another trend of German historiography, which was also started in the 1980s and which could be labeled as “a structural history of politics”. By concentrating on the long-term questions of politics, the changes in the mechanisms of power and the characteristics of inter-state relations, it re-integrated the world of politics among the methodologically sensitive approaches and fruitful themes of inquiry, from where it was banned by the breakthrough of social history in the mid-20th century. Apart from the surveys aiming to clarify the relations between political thought and the practical forms of government, or to describe specificities of early modern politics with contemporaneous terms, the most important methodological conclusions for the dissertation came from the research on legitimization initiated by Konrad Reigen. The methods suggested by the German historian: a systematic overview of the manifestos written for or against a given war and the analysis of their strategies of argumentation and a definition of their place in contemporary trends meant an important starting point for my own research. The various applications of the method of discourse analysis on Early Modern material have also provided me with examples for establishing a closely text-based, systematic approach which also takes into account the characteristics of and limits set by various types of sources. The introductory chapter of the dissertation gives an overview of this theoretical and methodological background.

The aim of the first chapter is to clarify the traditions that György Rákóczi II had to relate to and towards which he had to re-define Transylvanian foreign policy: this includes the analysis of the confessional element in the pre-1648 period as well as the place of Transylvania in the political map of mid-17th century

Europe. The attitude of György Rákóczi I towards the confessional element in foreign policy was somewhat ambivalent (chapter 1.1.). When writing for the legitimisation of his 1644-45 war, Rákóczi tried to push the confessional arguments into the background – the same way as his forerunner, Gábor Bethlen did. He distanced himself from the idea of a “sacred war” – that is, the dissemination of his faith with weapons – and tried to address, apart from his obvious allies, the Protestants of Hungary and the Catholic elite of the country. For this, he professed religious grievances in the form of defending the estates’ rights: the injuries of the confessions appeared as though against the Hungarian estates’ confessional rights in the texts arguing for the war, connected to other, confessionally neutral grievances. The strategy of the Prince had, however, only a limited success: his Catholic opponents – primarily the Palatine Miklós Esterházy – propagated their conviction that the campaign of Rákóczi had a solely religious background; at the same time, they obviously questioned its justifications. Simultaneously, they accused the Prince of keeping only his own selfish interest in mind when entering Hungary with his forces. A separation of *publicum* and *privatum* in the motifs of Rákóczi would be hardly feasible methodologically; nevertheless, it is clear that for the Prince and his adherents, one of the most important reasons for starting the war was the defence of their own religion. The confessional element was – in spite of the attempts to underplay it in the legitimacy writings – indeed a momentous element in the Transylvanian participation in the Thirty Years War.

In chapter 1.2., I analyse the conditions of the activities of Transylvanian foreign policy: what was the place of the Principality in the hierarchic system of the mid-17th century international system? The analysis is performed through a discussion of the diplomatic procedures of the treaties of Gyulafehérvár (1643, between Sweden and Transylvania) and Munkács (1645, between France and Transylvania), their enforcement, and the Transylvanian participation at the peace congress of Westphalia. Although Transylvania’s contribution to the Thirty Years War was indeed very advantageous for the anti-Habsburg alliance of the Crowns of

The last piece of motivation for an attempt to realise his plans in Poland was provided for Rákóczi in the treaty he concluded with the King of Sweden in Radnót. The chapter III.3. – after giving a summary of the historiographical debates on the foreign policy of Sweden in the 1650s – discusses previous analyses of the creation of the treaty of Radnót, which suggested that this agreement was the result of the plans of the Swedish King, aiming at the division of the *Rzeszpospolita* from the beginning of his campaign, and that Charles X Gustav involved Transylvania in his war in a false and deceitful manner – just as he did with Brandenburg. The systematic re-reading of the documents, however, supports another interpretation: György Rákóczi II established connections with the Swedish King on his own initiative, and Charles X Gustav’s attitude during the process of negotiation – which he could hardly influence due to some communication problems – does not seem to be more radical than the norms accepted in the age and also followed by the Prince himself. This interpretation seems to be especially valid if we take into consideration the attitude of the Swedish and French Crowns in the 1640s, compared to which the conduct of Charles X Gustav seems extraordinarily correct.

In the last chapter, my analysis focuses on the question of the motivations of György Rákóczi II’s foreign policy, and especially that of the Polish campaign. The well-spread image found in Swedish historiography – also shared by some Hungarian historians – according to which Rákóczi was a religious zealot, this being the chief motivation of his actions, is hardly tenable. The arguments usually presented to support this thesis – his connections to Comenius and the mission of Constantijn Schaum, a member of the Czech scholar’s circle, to the Protestant powers of Europe in 1655 – show that the Prince could skillfully use the network of the radical Protestants in order to further his own interests. According to some theses in Hungarian historiography, winning of the Polish throne would have only been a first step in Rákóczi’s conception. These theses cannot be supported by direct sources, and although they could be accepted as hypotheses, one can be sure that the Prince would have had to face severe problems had he tried to use his

both Romanian Voivodes, but he also received a yearly tribute from them and had a continuous supervision over their political activities (chapter III.1.). The events of 1653 also brought a remarkable change in the relationship between the Prince and the King of Poland: due to their common warfare against the Cossack troops, their enmity was replaced by a brotherhood in arms. Nevertheless, their attempts to codify their league were doomed to failure, as they had no common enemy after 1654, and neither of them wanted to bring down the other's most powerful adversaries' – the Tsar on one side, and the Ottoman and Habsburg Empires on the other – wrath on themselves with concluding a defensive alliance. The warfare in the Romanian Voivodates also brought new colour into the field of the legitimisation strategies of the princely foreign policy: the manifest allocated both was into the category of "preventive war", which remained somewhat controversial in the political thought of the age; however, it was gaining increasing popularity exactly in this period.

The Prince of Transylvania could maintain his role as a more or less outsider, but still an important element of the politics of the estates in the Kingdom of Hungary even after the death of Pál Pfaffy (chapter III.2.). Mediation towards the King was taken over from the deceased Palatine by György Szélepešényi, the Chancellor of the Kingdom, who had established cordial relations with Rákóczi, even if their political ideas were far away from each other. The Prince was disappointed to see that at the diet of 1655, the office of the Palatine was not given to a member of the Pfaffy-circle; however, he could mend his earlier differences with the newly elected Ferenc Wesselényi, and in the next year they could form a sober connection with each other. Miklós Zrínyi, who attempted to re-organise the remnants of the Pfaffy-group, maintained close relations with Rákóczi, who also stood in permanent contact with the new Lord Chief Justice, Ferenc Nádasdy. Even if there was no chance for gaining new territories this time, the Prince could maintain a secure hinterland for his Polish plans in the Kingdom of Hungary.

Sweden and France in the critical period of 1644, both states were reluctant to treat the Principality as an equal partner. The government in Stockholm did not ratify the treaty signed by its representative in Transylvania – and although this formal act did take place in the case of France, Mazari's government, in its turn, did not keep its conditions concerning the payments of subsidies. Their conduct concerning the treaty mirrors an attitude which is also clear from the question of the invitation of the Principality's envoys to the peace congress in Westphalia: one one hand, these powers did not trust Rákóczi's honesty, on the other, they were afraid that the Prince will present exaggerated claims that would hinder the possibility of vindicating their own interests. Their concerns clearly surpassed the customary level in early modern diplomacy, and although the Prince did provide reasons for it with his own conduct, the conclusion can nevertheless be drawn: their mistrust worked as a self-fulfilling prophecy and it led to results which were just contrary to those intended. The cumbersome execution of the conditions of his treaties provided an excellent pretext for Rákóczi – who was anyway struggling with reconciling the diverging interest of his supporters – to conclude his separate peace, thereby reinforcing the stereotype of the "unreliable ally" which had already been existing about him in Europe.

The first, exploratory period of Transylvanian foreign policy is covered by the second chapter: the primary questions are, in what degree and from what perspective did the conditions of the international system change, and which were the attempts of the Prince for the challenges offered by these. The analysis of the election of the King of Poland in 1648 (chapter II.1.) takes a look at these new ways: with the unprecedented success of the Cossack uprising, new opportunities emerged for realising the traditional aspirations of the Princes of Transylvania related to the Polish throne. Contemporaneous observers did not give much chance for the candidacy of the Transylvanian Prince; surprisingly, however, the conditions that they have imagined for his success, were fulfilled. Due to the death of György Rákóczi I, no Transylvanian candidate had any role in the actual

election; however, the political alliances formed during its preparatory process remained valid in the long run: the same people were the most important elements in the network of the Prince during the 1650s.

The most urgent task for the young Prince was to strengthen his rule in the Principality against the two neighbouring great powers (chapter II.2.). It took two years until György Rákóczi II managed to solve the financial conflicts with the Ottoman Empire that he had inherited from his father – by paying the tax arrears demanded from the Sultan's administration. The clarification of the relations towards the Habsburg Empire required less time – in this case, it was the reinforcement of the expulsion of the Jesuits from the Principality in 1653 that created tensions. In both cases, however, the relations to these great powers were relatively peaceful, and hardly limited the scope for action of Rákóczi's own political initiatives.

The most important direction for broadening this scope for action remained the Rzeczpospolita, even after the failure at the election of 1648. The contacts with Janusz Radziwiłł and other Protestants in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth still flourished, and the Prince of Transylvania also stayed in permanent communication with Bohdan Khmel'nys'kyi, Hetman of the Cossacks. In this period, there are already available sources for describing the attempts to legitimise the activities of Transylvanian foreign policy, and even an incidental war. In the conception of Rákóczi, he would have sent his troops to the Rzeczpospolita to answer an invitation from the Cossacks, but at the same time with the aim of reestablishing peace. Therefore, the justification of the Transylvanian intervention in the war between Poles and Cossacks would have been a combination of the legitimatory strategies of assistance and mediation.

The only measures in Transylvanian policy which produced actual results in this period did not take place in the direction of the Rzeczpospolita: a long series of negotiations eventually led to the marriage of Zsigmond Rákóczi with Henriette Mary, the sister of Carl Louis, Palgrave of the Rhine (chapter II.4.). Although there

is no data supporting the hypothesis that this match would have been a preparation of any concrete political co-operation between the two Principalities, this princely matrimony certainly raised the prestige of the Rákóczi dynasty and would have furthered the realisation of their long-term plans. Marrying into the international Calvinist political elite brought, however, only temporary results: although there were plans to seek another fiancée after the untimely passing of Henriette, these were nevertheless also thwarted by the death of Zsigmond himself in 1652.

Confession played an outstanding role in choosing the right match for Zsigmond Rákóczi; however, it had less and less power of motivation in the direction where it was of the greatest importance in the previous decade (chapter II.5.). The political life of the Hungarian estates was radically transformed after the codification of the regulations of the peace of Linz (1647): the confessional issue was overshadowed by other questions, and the political group forming around Palatine Pál Pálffy was dominated by Catholic aristocrats, as well as their main opponents, whose leader was the Archbishop of Esztergom and High Chancellor, György Lippay. Although the Prince's good relations to the Palatine were not even – in the second half of the year 1650, a certain estrangement can be registered –, but their contacts in the period between 1649-53 were continuous and unusually harmonious, taken into consideration the connections of the earlier holders of these two offices. The support received from the Palatine and his political group gave security to the Rákóczis, and what is more, it contributed to a formulation of anti-Habsburg plans in the princely court.

The third chapter addresses the activities in the period between 1653 and 1657, when the Prince – whose foreign policy was rather active in the preceding years as well – took part in several armed conflicts. The primary result of the crisis in Moldavia in the year 1653 – in which all powers of Eastern Europe, except for the Tsar, were involved – and the suppression of the riots in Wallachia in 1655 was that the Prince of Transylvania, for the first time in half a century, could feel secure about the hinterland of his country. He did not only have a defensive alliance with